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North by Northwest: quality assurance processes in education in Europe

Introduction

Quality assurance and evaluation processes (QAE) are increasingly important nationally and trans-nationally in education. They may steer policy and practice at all levels and in all sectors of education in national systems, and may be understood as a form of governance of education. The 'Fabricating Quality in European Education' project, funded through national research councils in three countries [England/ Scotland, Finland and Denmark, and university funding in Sweden], and with the European Science Foundation, focuses on the governance of education through policy convergence and divergence in QAE across the five education systems, and the extent of the Europeanization of education across the different systems. It is most common in the study of education that the local or national is treated as the bordered area of inquiry, even when references may be drawn from elsewhere. 'Fabricating Quality' engaged with the local, in the particularities and contexts of the national case studies, but it did so with an interest in relating them to a wider arena. It is still not common to find texts and projects which work across borders in Europe in education, and certainly not within social sciences in education. The processes of Europeanization are not as discernible to the researcher as the processes of policy making and implementing in the local or national areas. This can lead to the conclusion that there is no relation between them, and that the national is more significant than the European. Oddly, globalization processes have had more attention, although usually focused on the OECD, GATS or the World Bank.

For the purposes of this paper Europeanization contains several explanatory elements reflecting the complexity of processes which include direct effects of EU policy; transnational flows and networks of people, ideas and practices across European borders; and, finally, the Europeanizing effect of international institutions and globalisation. The project has been dealing with questions of performance, governance, scale, flow, scapes, and space across our constituent sites to understand the use of quality assurance

and audit practices in education. There is a tension between the local and the supranational, between place and space, and between the flow and the fixed across our sites. Between the flow of policy ideas and practices, constituting a new flexible space of policy convergences, and the steering of national education systems, lies the problem of the project, and the problem of governance. What are the processes which are changing education across our borders, what is the purpose of audits in education [QAE] and is there a common experience of performance, governing and 'Europeanization' in education?

Governing Europeanization Education

There has been an increase in research on the performance of education systems in Europe, both nationally and internationally (Henry *et al* 2001, Rinne 2000, 2003). This evidence contributes to the emergence of the 'evaluative state' (Neave 1998); the 'performance-evaluation nexus' (Clarke 2004) involving audit, inspection, evaluation and regulation, can be viewed through changes in the institutional steering or governing of school systems (Lindblad and Popkewitz 1999, 2000, 2001a, 2001b). The development of evaluation as a form of governing is, therefore of major significance in understanding education policy and the development of a knowledge society/knowledge economy as a key European objective (Ball 2002, Lawn 2003).

Therefore, the papers presented in this special issue bring education into the field of social science enquiry and theorising about the key issue of changing governance in Europe (Lawn and Lingard 2002, Novoa and Lawn 2002). Developments in performance measurement and management have been largely understood as vehicles for improved policy making and better-informed pedagogic school practices. This has been at the expense of social science concepts which enable changes in the management and flow of knowledge and information, and linked to new forms of governance, to be explored at education sites (Castells 2000, Desrosieres 2002, Power 1997).

Europe is an idea which allows the challenge facing the nation states within it to become manageable as globalization is beyond the scope of nation states to domesticate or manage by themselves. In this sense, Europe is not homogeneous yet it has common features: it is open to the market, it seeks to create a union which manages risk, and it governs itself by consensus and regulation. Europeanization is the process of formation of the European Union, the processes which are attached loosely or formally to this formation, or set in motion by it. It is also a political, spatial, networked phenomenon which is a specific element of globalization dealing with the new trans-national state which affects many interactions within it. The governance of the European education policy space appears as being increasingly 'produced' through building relations between actors in networks/communities. According to Ole Jensen and Tim Richardson (2004) the project of European integration is fundamentally concerned with the construction of a single European space, what they term a '*monotopia*', capturing the idea of a one-dimensional (*mono*) discourse of a space and territory (*topos*). The single market and single currency are examples of a concerted attempt to create Europe as 'one space' by removing constraints to the physical movement of goods and people for the sake of mobility, accessibility and connectivity, which are seen as answers to social and economic problems like exclusion, peripherality and uncompetitiveness (Jensen & Richardson, pp. 223–224). As a result, according to Delanty & Rumford (2005, p. 125), a Europe of global competitive flow has become hegemonic over the alternative idea of a Europe of places. The projects of Europeanisation seem increasingly dependent upon the co-operation and joint resource mobilisation of national policy actors who sometimes lie outside governmental hierarchical control (Shore, 2000). Further, policy networks accommodate the blurring of state/civil society boundaries that is such a feature of current policy-making with the growth of cooperation or dispersed responsibilities among state and non-state agencies, and engagement of actors from the private and voluntary sectors in the delivery of services. Also, it is important to stress that Europe is to be understood as fluid and changing, although this is mediated by older language barriers, regional histories, and immovable national projects. It is itself swept by international pressures, political, financial, technological and cultural, and it is simultaneously located in and produced by the global, the idea of the European and the national. It is operating at

different speeds: with high velocity and scale through a cosmopolitan cross border elite, and with low velocity and local embeddedness in distant sectors. There are many areas of Europe which are not connected to this space, its elite and its imaginaries. Dislocated by circumstance, location, political history, capital ownership and scale of community, cosmopolitanism is exchanged for sense of place and tradition in which Europeanization emerges as a distant regulation or impossible scale. Here the presence of the local appears to outweigh all outside influences or to disguise their trans-national pedigree.

The flow of Europeanization is enhanced and shaped by the indicators and data produced in the construction of Europe as a legible, governable, commensurate policy space. Comparison is a key element of the operation of multinational companies which is managed by numerical data, which has increased in velocity, scale and scope. Comparison for constant improvement against competition has come to be the standard by which public systems are judged, indeed as the project of Europe is now judged. While states originally managed this process of comparison in a limited way, the flow of national data internationally has increased. Comparison is now cross border; it is both an abstract form of competition and an element of it; it is a proxy for other forms of rivalry. Comparison is highly visible as a tool of governing at all levels - at the level of the organization [to manage] and of the state [to govern]. The next section explores the interrelatedness of the concepts of Europeanization and Globalisation, both of which frame much of the thinking behind QAE, both at the EU and the national level of the cases explored.

Europeanization through the lens of globalization

Although most of the writing on globalisation deals with its various economic, cultural and political characteristics, here the focus will be on aspects relevant to understanding the changing political and policy strategies of Europe and the processes of Europeanization as part of the 'global', including the transition from culture to numbers, discussed in the next section of the paper. The focus is on political and cultural globalization and their relevance to understanding Europeanization. Political globalization will be linked to a consideration

of the new scalar politics of education policy production and practices, while cultural globalization will be linked to the effects of what we might describe after the anthropologist James Clifford (1997) as 'dwelling in travel'.

A central political feature of globalization has been a rescaling, manifest in a new scalar politics which have reconstituted relations between the local, national, supranational and global (Brenner, 2004). This has witnessed new regional politics (eg NAFTA, APEC), changing roles of supranational political arrangements (eg EU, ASEAN), strengthened roles for international agencies (eg World Bank, OECD), and also reconstituted the state, its structure and ways of functioning at the national level, which has also come under regional and local pressures from within. This has seen a rescaling of statehood (Brenner, 2004) with the state now sitting within national, European and global hierarchies and networks. In this new scalar politics, the nation state is not powerless, but its new form and ways of functioning are both manifestations of globalization and responses to it. Similarly, the changing form and *modus operandi* of the EU and European Commission can also be seen as manifestations of globalization and responses to it, seeking to constitute a unified economy and single market in the context of a post Cold War world of neo-liberal market capitalism, dominated by one established and another emerging superpower. And education has taken on greater policy salience within the EU as it has been constructed as central to the strengthening of Europe as a knowledge economy as mandated in the Lisbon Declaration and as a single market. The enhanced policy influence of Europe in all policy domains including

education can be seen as part of the new scalar politics, articulating and responding to globalization.

The idea of nations as strategic actors (Castells, 2000) is an important one, because there is a tendency in talk about globalization and new scalar politics to reify globalization and to construct an account of the powerless state (Weiss, 1997). The nations of Europe are also strategic actors within Europe, as well as more broadly, while Europe itself also seeks to be a strategic actor in the context of globalization. We also need to recognise that different nations have varying capacities to be strategic actors and thus to mediate global and European pressures. The political pressures from above the nation from international organizations such as the OECD and from supranational agents such as the EU are always in a sense mediated by the national – the nation-state as strategic actor. What we might see after Bourdieu (2003) as the different amounts of ‘national capital’ possessed by a given nation are central to the nature and strength of national mediation and strategic actions of nation-states. For example, a study of new forms of governance in European education demonstrated that the ‘net-benefactor’ nations of Europe were in a weaker position *vis-à-vis* OECD and EU policies, than were the more powerful central economies of Europe (Lawn and Lingard, 2002). Thus we need to recognise that pressures from above the nation are always manifested in vernacular ways within the nation, reflecting national histories, traditions and politics. These include the pressures of Europeanization. The degree of mediation reflects the amount of ‘capital’ possessed at the national level, which in turn is indicative of the asymmetrical relations between nations within the EU and within globalization.

The concepts of flows, mobilities and scapes (Castells, 2000, Urry, 2000, Appadurai, 1996) have been developed by social theorists to help us understand economic, political and cultural globalization. Appadurai (1996) talks of cultural globalization as being manifested in the disjunctions between various flows, which he articulated as *ethnoscapes* to refer to the flows of migrants, tourists, students and we would add politicians, policy makers and European level policy actors; and, in particular, *ideoscapes* to pick up on the quickened global flows of ideas. On the latter, we can see the enhanced flows of policy ideas and

discourses in education which have accompanied globalization, what Ball (2006) has called *policyscapes* and what have also been called globalized policy discourses (Taylor et al., 1997). Quality assurance in education can be seen in this light. Shore (2000) in his study of Europeanization and the building of Europe has shown how the flows of national civil servants between the European Commission and the nations constitute this policyscape. Castells (2000) makes an important distinction between the new networks of policy elites and others, which flow across the boundaries of nations and the older hierarchical relations of governing within nations. For Castells, power is now exercised in the space of flows, rather than located in the place of the nation. This is the binary of motion and fixity in the rescaling of contemporary politics (Brenner, 1998). We can see here the tension, for example, between the flows of financial capital and the attempts of governments at the national level to produce national economic policies. It is not a question though, in the context of Europe, of politics of flows and networks as opposed to national politics and policy making in the hierarchies of nations, but a question of the relationships between the two and the extent to which the latter can mediate the former, given the asymmetrical relations between nations and Europeanization and globalization.

Picking up on this fixity/motion binary, Delanty and Rumford (2005) illustrate the spatial dynamic of contemporary Europe as a tension between territoriality, that is, places marked out by established geographical coordinates, and the fluidity represented by 'network Europe'. In theoretical terms this is Brenner's tension between fixity and motion – the confrontation between the logics of places and of networks and flows, set against an increasing awareness of the impact of globalisation. According to Delanty and Rumford, nation-state understanding of places has provided a particular imagery of territoriality – boundedness, cohesion, social solidarity, functional integration of administrative levels – which still exerts a powerful influence on the way we think about European space. On the other hand there is recognition that distinctly European spaces in different fields are emerging, but that the properties, dynamics and potential of these spaces are not sufficiently understood. To understand this emergent European space, new images have been introduced: networks, flows and scapes – all of which emphasize the

fluidity, mobility and interconnectedness, which are characteristic of contemporary Europe and the European policy space.

Castells (2000b, p.14) argues that the network society is constituted by the space of flows – ‘social practices without geographical contiguity’ in a world of mobility and networked connections, both European and global. Many dominant functions in societies (financial markets, transnational production networks, media systems etc.) are organised according to the logic of flows, as are many contemporary social movements. For Castells, the network society signals the advent of the information age, relying on a space of flows and the decline of industrial society relying on a space of places. This is the tension in contemporary politics referred to above between networks and hierarchies, flows and fixity, both supranational and national. The concept allows us to understand the interweaving between travelling policies and embedded policies (Ozga and Jones, 2006). Policy ideas such as quality assurance travel across national borders both within Europe and globally; nation states today dwell in such travel, as do policy makers at the national and supranational levels. The strategic actions of national policy makers are about mediating these travelling policies and policy discourses, and as noted they have varying strategic capacities to do this. They attempt to capture such travelling policies and rearticulate them at the national level. Conversely, some nations attempt to export their national policy solutions to other nations; the balance between importing and exporting education policies is also reflective of the positioning of a particular nation within global and European power relations.

Indicative of this reality is the coming together of what Novoa and Yariv-Mashal (2003) call the ‘global eye’ and the ‘national eye,’ as comparison has become central to the emergent form of networked European governance. Such European governing through comparison, benchmarks and indicators has seen the constitution of a European space of commensurability, as another manifestation of the rescaling of politics and policy making. According to Novoa and Yariv-Mashal (2003) international criteria and comparison are used to provide evidence that legitimates political actions, through such devices as the ‘international spectacle’ and the politics of ‘mutual accountability’.

The new scalar politics associated with Europeanization, new forms of governance through networks and flows and a new commensurate policy space in education are also complemented by the Lisbon Declaration's focus on the development of human capital across Europe as central to the production of Europe as a knowledge economy. This links to the economisation of education policy, whereby education has become a central arm of economic policy for the production of the requisite skills, dispositions and human capital thought to be necessary to national and European economic competitiveness. It is this human capital framing of education policy, which has challenged the subsidiarity argument about the place of education within Europe. Education, though, has since its universalization and massification been central to the construction of national identity, central to the creation of the 'imagined community' of the nation (Anderson, 1991). Schools have also been very much local institutions. In the context of globalization and European talk of subsidiarity, education has been a policy domain that nations have attempted to hold on to. Nonetheless, the rescaling of politics and flows of policy actors and policy ideas and discourses, along with the construction of a commensurate European space of measurement, have challenged this national autonomy and reconfigured the processes of policy making, extending the networks and location of the policy producing community. The challenge has come in the cases dealt with in this paper by processes of Europeanization and the flows of globalized discourses, but we also need to recognise the relationships between Europeanization and the politics and discourses produced by other international agencies such as the OECD in the context of globalization.

Reflecting the new scalar politics, of which Europeanization is perhaps the paradigm example, there has been a spatial turn in social theory. Brennan (2006) has suggested that the centrality of space and place in contemporary globalization theory manifests the apparent 'overcoming of temporality' (p.136), with this new theoretical optic ushering in a transition from 'tempo to scale', from 'the chronometric to the cartographic' (p.136). Brennan (2006) makes a distinction between space and place, which helps in understanding the networked and hierarchical relationships in contemporary governance and government, in the nations of Europe and at the European level. He distinguishes between space and

place in the following ways. He observes that, ‘‘Space’ is more abstract and ubiquitous: it connotes capital, history, and activity, and gestures towards the meaningless of distance in a world of instantaneous communication and virtuality’ (p.136). Place in contrast, he notes, connotes ‘the kernel or centre of one’s memory and experience – a dwelling, a familiar park or city street, one’s family or community’ (p.136). The space/place relationship is played out in particular ways in contemporary education policy, the local and the specific – the vernacular – against global and European flows and the constitution of post- and supra-national spaces. The dwelling of national quality assurance policies in education are continually affected by the flows in the European and global space. Many of the flows associated with globalization are also linked to the new information technologies. These ICTs have also had an impact on temporality and our experience of it. Brennan (2006, p.128) notes that the elision of temporality associated with such technologies gives emphasis to what he calls the ‘‘year zero’’ of the now. Quality assurance and other indicators and performance measures, central to the audit culture at both national and European levels, in their present and future focus, are indicative of this new temporality associated with globalization. They are about constructing the future. We can also see that different speeds are associated with the flows of space and the dwellings of place..

From culture to numbers: the audit turn in European education

The concepts of indicators, benchmarking and quality assurance have had a relatively short presence in the history of the European education systems. However, in this brief space of time they have become the new dominant discourses in the process of fabricating the space of European education. Even though an interest in measuring educational performance through numerical data was evident as early as the mid-70sⁱ, the turning point towards an increased interest in setting standards for education systems in Europe was the Lisbon Council of 2000. According to the Presidency conclusions, ‘the European Union is confronted with a quantum shift resulting from globalisation and the challenges of a new knowledge-driven economy’ (Council, 2000). Apart from setting specific objectives, such as an increased investment in human resources, the establishment of a European framework for lifelong learning and the fostering of

educational mobility, the Council also suggested a new style of policy formation, the ‘Open Method of Coordination’ (OMC) (Council, 2000). Indicators and benchmarking are at the heart of this new policy tool,

Further, it was in Lisbon where education, as a policy field, began to be displaced by ‘learning’ (EC 2001b), another increasingly important exemplar of ‘soft governance’ in Europe. According to the Lisbon Council, learning promotes the development of Europe as ‘the most competitive knowledge economy in the world’ (EC 2001, Sedel 2004, Gornitzka 2006) and hence constitutes the future for its economies, populations and institutions. European *education* has thus shifted from its institutionalised and ordered realm of subsidiarity to become a new fluid, flexible and cross national phenomenon; that of *learning*. Redefined as such, it has acquired increased significance in EU policy making; it has become the cornerstone of Europeanization; the space in which Europe is being produced. The 20th Century idea, that ‘education is, by definition, the space for the construction of national identity’ (Nóvoa, 2000, p. 46) has been transformed: ‘learning’ has become the space for the creation of European identity.

According to Anders Fogh Rasmussen, Prime Minister of Denmark, commenting on the Treaty of Lisbon, ‘the good thing is that all the symbolic elements are gone, and that which really matters –the core– is left’ (Jyllands-Posten, 2000). Indeed, many of the ‘old’ European ‘symbolic elements’ after the Lisbon treaty have gone for good. Although some of the Euro-symbols of the 1980s, the Erasmus programme and other constructs of the older European ‘common culture’ project still hold strong, the language of numbers has gained an ‘extraordinary’ significance, as a top official from the Commission argued (Grek, 2008).

For a long time in the history of the European education space, education governance was exercised through technologies of the ‘self’ (Foucault, 1978), which had systematically been working towards establishing new normative categories and constructing new meanings: these were notions like the ‘common European values’, the ‘common culture’, or the notion of ‘Europeanness’. According to Shore, ‘constructing Europe requires the

creation of ‘Europeans’, not simply as an objectified category of EU passport holders and ‘citizens’, but, more fundamentally, as a category of *subjectivity*’ (2000, p. 30). The strategy and the tactics towards the construction of a European subjectivity, by often being astonishingly direct and almost propagandistic, were sometimes harshly criticized and rejected (Delanty, 1995).. Nevertheless, these ideals had a strong social dimension which became particularly appealing and promising after the devastation and despair of the two World Wars. The Member States of the Union were invited in a project to build a social Europe which would establish itself as the significant ‘Other’ against the inhumanity of an economic system of winners and losers, which was accelerating to global dominance.

However, it soon turned out that the ‘people’s Europe’ (Shore, 1993) was not sufficient to respond to the demands of the new millennium. Despite subsidiarity, the field of education served for over three decades in the project of the creation of a European common identity. In history and geography, in narratives and tradition, Europe became a ‘classical’ value, timeless and undisputed. Education and culture, through over-emphasising commonalities and sidelining differences, were handy crutches in lifting the idea of Europeanization.

At the same time, during this first era of the construction of the European education space, national education systems remained more or less the same; they welcomed exchanges and networks as the additional European ‘extra’, which offered a fresher flavour of cosmopolitanism in their somewhat stale school curricula. In the face of globalization and the dominance of the knowledge economy, new and urgent technologies of persuasion had to be devised; the voluntary nature of the previous arrangement was too loose to respond to the severe economic challenges of both the education and the wider market. Creating, regulating and monitoring, or in other words, governing the European education space now had to be based on statistics and what Rose (1991) calls ‘governing by numbers’. In fact, one of the greatest post-Lisbon developments in the history of the EU is the weight given to education and training in

Europe; *first*, for the EU, rather than an area at the periphery of policy-making, education and learning have now become central in constructing Europe itself. Europe does not need to pre-exist in the hearts and minds as it was before –it is being created, sorted, systematized, scrutinized and constantly improved through the new soft governance tools of comparison and benchmarking. Hard EU regulation, in areas such as agriculture or trade for example, often meet the resistance and criticism of ‘Euro-sceptics’; ‘soft’ law (Lawn, 2003), on the other hand, is self-imposed and self-adhered; it is effective, manageable and economical; it looks optional and ‘light-touch’; it seems objective and forward-looking; it relates to current concerns. *Second*, for the member-nations, in the field of education, Europe has become the relatively friendlier face of globalization; it gives them a platform to raise their voice; it offers them a quality assurance framework, which they would otherwise have had to devise on their own; it often provides them with ‘best practice’ advice, leaving the content of the curriculum intact; it often offers them a scapegoat, which they can readily blame in order to justify reform.

However, no matter how misguided ‘Euro-romantics’ have been, Rasmussen is also seriously wrong –the ‘core’ is not stripped of ideological and symbolic weight. The new technology of the governance of the European education space through quality assurance processes is not only to be seen as the project of fulfilling Brussels’ requirements of achieving specific goals and objectives. Instead, it has to be examined as the deeply penetrating, consciousness-moulding and thus serious business of constructing new categories of (educational) thought and action –the project of re-inventing a ‘new’ European identity of competitive advantage and responsible individualism. According to Hacking, ‘the bureaucracy of statistics imposes not just by creating administrative rulings but by determining classifications within which people must think of themselves and of the actions that are open to them’ (1991, p. 194). At their best these new governance technologies have offered a more coherent and organized framework for the improvement of the quality of education systems across Europe; at their worst, they are simply transforming education cultures and traditions, every aspect of teaching and learning, into tables and graphs, devoid of meaning, political context or any sense of history and place.

This collection of papers attempts to highlight the significance of understanding that the shift to ‘governing by numbers’ is not merely a discursive, cosmetic or surface change, but in fact could be understood as the very process which has become one of the central components of building the new Europe of the knowledge economy. There seems to be a serious imbalance in the history of the construction of the European education space: from almost obsessively focusing on the ‘big’ history of a very remote past that belonged to few and was of interest to even fewer, Europe has turned to an almost anxiety to forecast, control and shape a one-way future; QAE has become a major instrument in operationalising these efforts.

QAE in Europe: cases from the north-western periphery

In the complex spatial dynamic of contemporary Europe, global education policy reforms (*travelling policies*) have a tendency to emerge, diffuse around the globe and reshape socially and politically different societies with dissimilar histories. Embedded policies are to be found in ‘local’ spaces (national, regional or local), where global policy agendas come up against existing practices and priorities (Ozga & Jones 2006, pp. 2-3). With this process, global policy paradigms are producing local manifestations and finally shaping up diverse and distinctive policyscapes (Ball, 2006).

What makes policy travel or flow across Europe, within wider policy spaces, is of interest here. What problems are solved in this way? What remains stubborn against the external? What appears to flow but only thinly? What is used as camouflage, mimicry or mimesis? Our research reveals similarities and differences between our national sites. More to the point, it has produced evidence of apparent travel and flow when there are only discursive simulacra, a common language but uncommon contexts. For example, the

emphasis on self-evaluation, common to the five countries in different forms, and increasingly common to Europeanization processes in QAE varies nationally – and even locally, as seen in cases of Denmark, Finland and Sweden. It can be understood as an *addition* to other QEA practices (like ‘hard performance indicators’) or it can be taken as a *substitute* for more strict and centralised forms of governance. For example, as Ozga and Lingard on the case of England discuss, school self-evaluation evidence is to be ‘the starting point for inspections’; in Denmark, Andresen *et al.* manifest how it is considered as a ‘fixed element in the evaluations conducted by the Danish Evaluation Institute’. The Scottish system of self-evaluation, according to Croxford *et al.*, prescribes indicators rather than self-chosen goals. Further, Simola *et al.* and Segerholm discuss the ways in which in Finland and Sweden respectively, the municipal providers of education are obligated to evaluate what they provide, but not in any particular or fixed fashion. What appears to be most significant is not the discourse or the variations on practice, but that ‘the local space for manoeuvre has been successively narrowed by an increased amount of QAE activities’. It connects the use of data to ideas of responsabilisation and self-steering that inculcate new norms and values that transform the conduct of organisations and individuals in their capacity as ‘self-actualising’ agents, so as to achieve political objects through ‘action at a distance’ (Rose, 1992).

Processes of Europeanization are subdued or hidden within this complexity; they appear to be global, national and local at the same time. On the other hand, the sudden entry of the state into international comparison and an evaluation culture opened the door wide to ‘outside’ influence: the crisis in Denmark following the PISA results of 2003 was a crisis of governance, about means and ends, faced with overpowering international judgments. The Swedish obligation upon the municipalities to continuously evaluate and follow-up the local school plan shifted downwards the responsibility for finding solutions for improvement and quality. At the same time, the national state uses new data to produce comparisons on progress between schools, municipalities and nations, particularly nations which it feels are ‘natural comparators’, known as a process of ‘informative steering’.

Where do European wide processes which enable flow take place? - producing data standards, translating text, mediating meanings or agreeing exchanges. What speeds up and what slows down policy exchange, and the concomitant elements [experts, data and technologies] which support or inhibit? The papers from Sweden and England indicate that some countries are leaders in QAE processes, by example, by successful international comparison or by their own benchmarking. However, diversity is present across the project, and so are its explanations. Danish explanation is rooted in strong ideas of 'vertical' enlightenment, and its shaping of system and behaviour, while although Finnish discursive power is strong, developed while 'riding the OECD slipstream', internal system variation is wide, embedded in region and place. In Sweden and Scotland, the discourses and tools of QAE have remained recognisable over time but their meaning and practices have altered; they appear to have tightened and their explanation shifted around key terms, like profession, country and improvement. The most 'advanced' regulatory state, England, known across Europe for evaluatory practices, like inspection, seems to be moving swiftly into a new post regulatory condition, 'intelligent accountability'. As the papers in this special issue show, a consistent feature of European QAE is that the solution to managing outcome based systems has become a major labour process in itself. 'Measure fixation', 'governing from behind' and the privacy of evaluation data [its lack of flow within systems] are producing performance overload ['evaluation bloat'].

Governing through data in systems created and expectant of older relations, is a major, new confusion while appearing as a simple, logical governing process. So Europeanization is both a harmonising and a dislocating process. We would argue that this is revealed within the study of the relationship between evidence data and governing in Europe. Space and place are in a tense relation to each other; it is not easy to dwell in the flow.

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ⁱ A European Commission resolution emphasised the significance of information sharing between Member States and the need for education statistics (OJ C 38, 19.2.1976). Eurostat started publishing data from national statistics since 1978, nonetheless it was only after the 1990s that it began producing more statistically comparable data.